SOUTH CAROLINA STATE MUSEUM
PRE-VISIT MATERIALS
FOR THE MUSEUM LESSON

COLONIAL LIFE IN SOUTH CAROLINA

(Grades 4-8)

TO THE TEACHER

OVERVIEW

The lesson explores the documentary evidence of daily life in both urban and rural areas of South Carolina during its colonization in the 18th century. The South Carolina State Museum's exhibits on the Revolutionary War emphasize the differences between these colonist groups and how they later mobilized against the British.

EDUCATIONAL GOAL

Students will understand why some groups chose to live in the backcountry of South Carolina and what their life was like. They will gain an understanding of the material culture of the 18th century, and how location, education and wealth can be reflected in object ownership. Students, also, will learn the value and limitations of primary sources.

BEFORE YOUR VISIT – IN THE CLASSROOM

Use the enclosed materials to prepare for your visit to the State Museum. Your **Pre-Visit Packet** includes:

1. A brief history and the main themes of colonial South Carolina history.
2. A description and definition of what probate inventories are and how they were taken.
3. Pre-visit activity ideas to prepare students for the lesson.

AT THE MUSEUM

The docent-taught lesson will include a visit to the museum's exhibit on frontier settlement and colonization. Students will work in groups to compare probate inventories of men and women who lived in Charles Town and the backcountry in the 1760s and 1770s. Students, also, will examine reproductions of items mentioned in the documents.

AFTER YOUR VISIT

- Use any of the suggested activities as in-class or homework assignments.
- Visit the South Carolina Department of Archives and History and do further research and examination of primary documents.
- Have students write reports on a colonial personage or create a diary of a backcountry settler.

PRE-VISIT ACTIVITY IDEAS

1. **Inventory –**
   Ask students to conduct an inventory of their personal property or of one room of their house. They may find this task daunting, so suggest they inventory a closet or kitchen cupboard. The students should list the entire contents, item by item. Ask other students to use their imagination to picture the space. If the student inventories a closet or space of a parent or sibling, ask the other students what they can tell about this person by the object that he or she owns.

2. **Object Identification –**
   Have students bring an object from home. They should try to make it obscure, it could be an antique, as long as they know its use, what it is made of and the approximate date of its manufacture. Form the students into groups and have them analyze the other student's objects. Can they guess what it is, when it was made and its materials? You can, also, try this activity blindfolded.

3. **Advertisements as Primary Sources –**
   Assign each student a year (1949, 1950, 1890) and ask them to look up newspaper or magazine advertisements. Ask them to list objects that someone might have purchased for a kitchen, a bedroom, an office or a workplace. Are these items similar to what we use today? How are they different and why?

ABOUT PROBATE INVENTORIES

Inventories are a valuable source of information about Colonial Life because they were a mandated record of personal belongings prepared after someone died. A friend of a family member of the deceased – the executor or executrix, usually guided the appraisers of the estate through the dwelling. Inventories were taken for people who had died with or without a will. Since there were no inheritance taxes, the inventories' contents should not have been determined by a concern for an intact inheritance. All portable goods were to be recorded, but some things, such as a cupboard listed with its contents, could be listed together.

Inherent flaws exist in using inventories for gathering information. First, inventories were taken only for people who died with possessions; the poorest citizens of Charles Town and the backcountry never were recorded in this type of document. Secondly, appraisers skipped over, missed, or purposely chose to leave out various household items. No set form required the itemization of all property. For example, land was usually not recorded because of the common law regarding the inheritance of real estate. Debts usually were not added to the total value of an estate, and personal items, especially clothing, often were omitted by the appraiser.

These omissions are present in the inventories selected for the lesson, so the challenge will be in asking the students to critically judge the sources. Because different appraisers recorded the inventories, the students may see the evidence of form variation and will probably notice the absence of items that must have existed. This education in primary sources is one of the goals of the lessons.

MAIN THEMES OF SOUTH CAROLINA COLONIAL HISTORY

Some main thematic events of South Carolina Colonial history are:

1. The economic success of the rice and indigo plantations in the lowcountry.
2. The migration of European settlers westward and southward into the backcountry.
3. The battles between the frontier settlers and the Native Americans.
4. The regulator movement in reaction to frontier violence and crime.

These four events encouraged the political and social segregation of the backcountry and lowcountry. The museum lesson used probate inventories to give a firsthand account of individuals experiencing these events and is meant to augment a classroom curriculum covering these subjects.

BACKGROUND HISTORY

The production and export of rice and indigo, and their success in the British market, gave South Carolina its reputation for extraordinary wealth in the 18th century. Rice-growing techniques were perfected by the 1720s and its market success created a huge demand for the importation of African slaves and the acquisition of lowcountry land. Although prices fluctuated with the crises of transport and overproduction, rice remained a staple crop. Indigo was made a viable export after a West Indian variety was perfected by Eliza Pinckney in 1744. A British bounty (e.g. a bonus) was obtained in 1748 and provided the booming British textile market with a necessary and valuable supply of the blue dye. Planters who grew wealthy exporting both crops, as well as the craftspeople and merchants who were supported by their wealth, created a vibrant and diverse Colonial Charles Town.

The economic success of South Carolina was made possible through the success of slavery. Slave labor toiled in the rice and cotton fields and built the grand homes of plantation owners. Skilled slave craftsmen, such as carpenters, blacksmiths and coopers, were rented out by their owners with the master keeping most of the money. Strict laws regulated every aspect of the lives of slaves and free blacks. Of all the societies that enslaved Africans in the New World, only the one established in what is now the southern United States grew through natural increase. About 400,000 people were brought from Western Africa to the southern colonies from the early 17th century until 1808. By 1860 the black population had increased to about 4 million.

The success of South Carolina's economy encouraged immigrants to settle in the backcountry where land was cheaper and more abundant. Settlement was encouraged particularly by Gov. Robert Johnson after The Yamassee War (1715-17) in the 1730s. Tensions with Native Americans and the French lessened after the 1760s. This caused a dramatic increase in the number of settlers moving into the colony. Because a settled

backcountry would secure the lowcountry from either Native American or African slave uprisings, settlers were offered special benefits: tax exemptions or reductions and exemptions from debt collectors' seizure of livestock. Along the "Great Wagon Road", stretching from Pennsylvania to Georgia, immigrants populated the backcountry. At first, small farms, worked for self-sufficiency, were the average landholding, but some indigo and tobacco plantations flourished by 1760. In addition, hemp, wheat for flour production, and some, were grown for export. Larger landholdings often used slave labor and, could have supported herds of cattle.

Because the majority of settlers in the backcountry were non-slaveholding European immigrants, the racial make-up of the state varied dramatically. By 1790 nearly 80 percent of whites in South Carolina lived in the backcountry. In contrast to the lowlands, the majority of backcountry whites were of non-English heritage: Scottish, Irish (mostly Scotch-Irish), German and French in descending order.

As the Europeans moved into the backcountry, Native Americans defended their lands. Tribes called the Savanoes, Yamassees, Catawba and Cherokees occupied lands in the Carolina territories. Risking conflict with these groups, the English demand for deerskin gloves and breeches had driven South Carolina traders into the backcountry. Some Native Americans supply English traders who exported the skins through Charles Town. But this activity threatened territory occupied by interior tribes and eventually, the French and Spanish. The Yamassees led an attack on South Carolina settlements in 1715, which was called the Yamassee War although 15 different tribes were involved. This was a combined effort to destroy the Europeans and discourage further settlement. When defeated, many of the surviving tribes moved to Florida. The deerskin trade continued but was later eclipsed by rice and indigo. Concerns over conflict with the French and Native Americans continued to trouble Governor Glen and the settlers, but did not stop their push into the frontier.

Beyond these concerns of violence, settlers, faced roving criminals and thieves who took advantage of the lack of government or authority in the backcountry. A group of settlers banded together in the 1760s to organize the "Regulators", a self-appointed group formed to intimidate, capture and punish alleged thieves and murderers. In 1768, the Regulators were somewhat appeased with the Circuit Court Act creating seven new courthouses to address the issues of crime that pervaded the state far beyond Charles Town. Before the 1760s, the backcountry had no representation in the Commons House of Assembly, and farmers complained that their land was taxed at the same rate per acre as a rice plantation although it did not yield the same value from its crop. The backcountry inhabitants petitioned the House in Charles Town for adequate facilities. Into the 1770s, the frontier had no schools, no aid for the poor and orphaned, and poor roads, crucial for moving produce to markets. The conflict between the ruling Charlestonians and the backcountry was exacerbated because of differences in ethnicity. Many Scotch-Irish who immigrated to South Carolina did so to escape British rule in Ireland, yet were without representation in the predominantly English and Anglican capital of Charles Town.

Political, economic and ethnic differences separated the lowlands and the backcountry of South Carolina through the Colonial period. Some historians have argued that the two sides unified as the Revolutionary War approached because of the rowing sophistication of the backcountry. As the lowcountry became more convinced that Great Britain devalued Colonial products while forcing British goods on the Colonial market, their sympathies with the rebellion grew. As settlement in the backcountry expanded, small farmers acquired more land and slaves and larger plantations evolved. Its economy developing rapidly, the backcountry made merchant contacts in Charles Town, forming connections between the regions' elite and a common concern over trade issues with Britain. By 1776 Charles Town began to view its rural neighbors as allies.